Imperial College London

How to write an academic CV

CVs provide a concise summary of skills, knowledge and experience and to be effective they need to be tailored to a specific role or sector. This handout looks at CVs for PhD students applying for academic roles such as postdoc, research fellow and teaching positions.

LAYOUT AND LENGTH

All CVs, including academic ones, should be laid out clearly for the reader so that they are easy to read (see the tips section for ideas on how to achieve readability). It is conventional to have your name in large letters at the top followed by contact details. Don't allow your contact details to take up too much space on the page – they are there for information and not to select you. There are no restrictions on the length of academic CV as they usually contain lists such as conferences and publications and so can be long. However, do not make your CV unnecessarily long through poor formatting choices.

CONTENT

Academic CVs tend to include standard headings with content listed under each heading in reverse chronological order. You only need to include those headings for which you have content and it is not expected that you will have content for every section, particularly at an early stage in your career. As your career progresses you are likely to begin to develop content in more of these areas.

The most common section headings you will find on an academic CV are:

- **Education**

Your PhD should appear at the top of this section. Include the start and end dates as it is relevant to the reader how long you took to complete your PhD. Also include the name of the institution, title of the thesis and name of your supervisor.

Under your PhD you can, optionally, choose to list some bullet points that convey your key research achievements. To make this effective you should present these using active words. Examples of active words are 'solved', 'identified', 'increased' – there are many others. Use these bullet points to pin point the contribution your research has made to your research area.

Follow the presentation of your PhD by listing your previous qualifications in reverse chronological order i.e. the most recent first. Include start and end dates, title and level of qualification, institution and grades. If you studied in a different country to that in which you are applying, don't try to 'translate' the grades but just present them as you would in the country in which they were obtained. You may want to include the title of your dissertation or highlight any relevant courses or options you took.

- **Research employment**

If you have been employed as a research assistant either before or during your PhD, include the relevant dates, job titles and employers here. You can also include bullet points detailing your research achievements in each position.

- **Technical skills**

For any position such as a postdoc where you will be employed hands on to do research you should list your relevant technical skills. Organise this section so that it is easy to read. For example break down your skills into convenient sub-groups. If there are skills you think are particularly relevant to the position you are applying for then put them at the start of the list or even highlight them in bold. You can include IT skills here as well as laboratory skills.

- **Awards and prizes**

List here any prizes you have won for academic merit, again in reverse chronological order. If the prize will not be understood to the reader, give a brief explanation. For example 'awarded for highest mark in the year'.

- **Publications**

This is one of the most important sections on an academic CV. It is very important to make sure you are presenting your publications professionally. Peer reviewed journal articles are the publications that really matter on the academic job market and these should be listed together and first. Present the publications as you would expect to see them cited in an article and with the most recent first. They should then always be in reverse chronological order. You can highlight your own name in bold so that it is clear at a glance where it is in the list of authors if this is relevant to your contribution to the publication. You can also note anything that speaks to the impact of the publication, for example being selected for the cover of a journal or for a highlight article. It should be clear where the article is in the publication process, for example 'submitted', 'under review', 'accepted for publication'.

In coming to the end of your PhD you may have a plan to publish your work but not yet have submitted anything to a journal. It is possible to include a list of planned publications on the CV in your early stages of your career as it is understood that publication processes take some time. However you should be cautious in this area. This list must be clearly

labelled and separate to the published list. It must be realistic so you can defend it in interview. That means that you should have finished all the experimental work and analysis, ideally be working on a draft and know where you will submit the paper to and when. You may be asked for an update on progress towards publication in an interview.

If you have other types of publication then you can group them together under appropriate headings. These could include book chapters, media articles or blogs.

- **Funding**

This heading is typical of academic CVs for more senior researchers. It refers to obtaining funding for research (i.e. not scholarships which would be listed under 'Awards and Prizes'). If you have gained experience of obtaining research funding by the end of your PhD then you should list it under this heading. However do not worry if you don't have this experience yet. You should be aware that it is important to look towards building your knowledge of research funding and gaining experience if you are planning a long term academic career.

- **Conferences**

In the early stages of your research career this may simply be a list of conferences you have attended. However as you gain experience that list becomes too long and researchers cut it down to the list of conferences talks given. The idea of this section is to show that you have been networking, ideally outside your institution and even country. This indicates that you are being exposed to different ideas and feedback and are building your academic reputation.

- **Patents**

This section heading is not relevant to all researchers but if you have been involved with a patent then you should list it.

- **Teaching experience**

This includes all teaching experience such as lab demonstrating, exam marking, small group teaching, supervising research projects or one to one teaching. Group this sensibly and to avoid needless repetition. Be aware that course codes do not translate from one institution to another and so can be left out. Do include the ranges of topics you have taught and the types of students, for example year groups. Include any evidence that your teaching has been high quality, for example a teaching award. However avoid anecdotal feedback that cannot be corroborated, such as 'all the students said the course was really fun'.

- **Academic service**

This is a very useful catch all heading for any of those activities that serve the wider academic community such as organising conferences, sitting on committees or peer-reviewing articles. This shows that you are engaged in the community and on track to develop the right experience for an academic career.

- **Collaborations**

You may want to list your collaborations if you have any at this stage. However you should make sure they are your collaborations and not your supervisor's i.e. will you be able to continue the collaboration independently once you leave your current group?

- **Training**

You may wish to list training that you have that gives evidence that you are progressing your academic career to the next stage. For example training on leadership, management, teaching or writing funding proposals. Do not list any training that inadvertently leaves a bad impression such as 'time management'.

- **Work experience/volunteering**

This is where you can list the other elements of your experience since you started university. This could be internships during vacations, time spent volunteering or jobs you have done to earn money.

- **Interests and achievements**

It is not common for more senior academics to list their outside interests and achievements on their CV. However it won't cause any problems if you do list them, especially if they show useful skills such as leadership or resilience.

- **References**

References are taken seriously in academia. It is usual to include your PhD supervisor and at least one other academic. This could be a collaborator, your thesis examiner or your internal examiner, for example. You should always alert your referees that you are putting them down as a reference and what you are applying for.

LAYOUT TIPS

There are no hard and fast rules about layout. The principle to be guided by is that your CV needs to be easy to read and get information out of. However here are some suggestions to follow:

- Keep the same typeface throughout and don't use less than 11pt
- Keep a reasonable size of margin on the page
- Use line spacing between sections and under headings
- Avoid underlining and italics as these are harder to read
- Use bold to highlight e.g. section headings
- Make sure there is a balance of text and white space on the page. If there are large areas of the page that are blank you could probably use the space better.

FURTHER SUPPORT

Available from the Careers Service:

- **Careers Service website**: www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/cv
- **Bookable appointments** with Careers Consultants: book through JobsLive*
- For information on the disclosure of disability or specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia please see information on the Careers Service website: www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/disclosure

* www.imperial.ac.uk/careers/jobslive